

Best practices to prevent plagiarism

(Numbers in Brackets refer to Sources list)

Introduction

As with most diseases—and, let's face it, plagiarism is an infectious, insidious disease, the best course of action is prevention. In order to combat plagiarism it must be stopped before even the smallest pathogen can enter the body academic. As educators, it is our duty to prevent plagiarism from occurring as much as it is our duty to identify when it occurs. The following list provides some suggestions on how we can work together as a university to stop plagiarism before it begins.

Techniques

- **Talk to students about plagiarism!** Tell them about all the variant forms of plagiarism. Make sure to tell them about the consequences of being a plagiarist (1). The alarming incidence of unintentional plagiarism suggests that students do not have a good understanding the different forms of plagiarism. Consider placing a paragraph in your syllabus detailing campus policy on plagiarism. *If you don't do talk to them about plagiarism, who will?*
- **Be as clear as humanly possible with assignments!** Nothing is more frustrating for students and professors alike than an unclear assignment (e.g., Is group work allowed? Can online sources be used? Roughly how many pages are you looking for? Is there an upper-limit to the amount that you will read?) (3)
- **Do not simply tell students to write a research paper.** Approach your students as if they have not previously written a research paper. Prepare them for the task of both research and writing. (6)
- **Specific tips for guiding students in assigning a research paper:**
 - **ORGANIZATION:**
 - **Time management.** Allocate sufficient time for student writing. Insist that the research phase must stop by a specified date. (2)
 - **Personalize the assignment.** This suggestion works better for some disciplines than others but, with some creativity, any assignment can be tailored so that it excites the student. The more excited a student is about a topic, the less likely it is that the student will be tempted to cheat. (4)
 - **Paper Requirements.** Require specific components in a paper (e.g., a specified number of books, articles, Internet sources—the more specific or refined you make your requirements, the more difficult it is to find something out there with that already meets your requirements). (3)

- **Don't be afraid to assign topics** [\(3\)](#). I know that it sounds harsh but when a student needs direction in the research process and doesn't get it, I think that the chances dramatically increase for that student to turn to cheating or not completing the assignment [\(9\)](#). Provide suggestions on possible topics for research assignments.

- **SOURCES OF INFORMATION:**
 - **Alternative Information.** Show students how to use alternative sources for information such as list serves or non-mainstream media. The more sources of information that students are aware of, the more interested they may become in a topic.

- **BEFORE THE FINAL PAPER IS DUE:**
 - **Schedule a Library Orientation.** Make an appointment with a reference librarian to show students how to use the library. This is an efficient way to introduce research skills to students. Librarians are happy to help students with research.
 - **Workbooks / Research Logs.** Have students keep journals or logs of the research process. [\(6\)](#) Also have the students keep a record of not only the print and online source they use, but also of the people that they ask for help (e.g., professors, librarians, other students, researchers, etc.). [\(5\)](#)
 - **Annotated Bibliographies.** Have students turn in an annotated bibliography weeks before a final draft of the paper is required. [\(7\)](#)
 - **Drafts.** Insist on seeing versions of their papers. It helps you determine who is making genuine progress as well as who is trying to pass off a paper that is obviously not theirs.

- **EVIDENCE OF RESEARCH:**
 - **Evidence of Sources.** Make students turn in photocopies of sources [\(1\)](#). Better yet, have students use a bibliographic manager, such as WriteNote. A bibliographic manager helps students manage their sources while also letting you see an electronic copy of what they are using [\(1\)](#). Contact [Peter Sezzi](#), Reference Librarian, for more details on how WriteNote can be used in your classes.

- **“Green ink.”** Have students write down their original thoughts in one color while the words of original source are written in contrasting color. [\(1\)](#)
- **RESEARCH & THE CLASSROOM**
 - **Research / Classroom Nexus. Part I.** Tie in outside-class research to in-class discussion / presentation. [\(2\)](#)
 - **Research / Classroom Nexus. Part II.** Tie in outside-class research to in-class exams (e.g. on the Final or on the day that the paper is due, ask students to summarize in writing the main points of their research). [\(2\)](#)

Sources

1. [The New Plagiarism: Seven Antidotes to Prevent Highway Robbery in an Electronic Age](#) (Jamie McKenzie)
2. [Cheating 101: Paper Mills and You – Easy Steps to Combatting \[sic\] Plagiarism](#) (Peggy Bates and Margaret Fain, Coastal Carolina University) [Coastal]
3. [Anti-Plagiarism Strategies for Research Papers](#) (Robert Harris) [Virtual Salt]
4. [Cut-and-Paste Plagiarism: Preventing, Detecting and Tracking Online Plagiarism](#) (Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe, University of Illinois Library at Urbana-Champaign)
5. This suggestion comes from my experience working with students in capstone classes taught by CI History professor Frank Barajas.
6. CI University Librarian Paul Adalian does an excellent job of incrementally preparing students for a research paper assignment in his English 310 course.
7. Rainer Buschmann, a History professor at CI, provides excellent guidance in preparing students for the task of writing a research paper.
8. This suggestion comes from CI English professor Renny Christopher.
9. This is my own personal feeling on the topic.